

Quick Guide

Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue



Background and Intent

To end homelessness for everyone, we must link people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including people sleeping and living in encampments¹, with permanent housing opportunities matched with the right level of services to ensure that those housing opportunities are stable and successful. It is only through the provision of such opportunities that we can provide lasting solutions for individuals and communities. Across the country, many communities are wrestling with how to create effective solutions and provide such housing opportunities for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Policy-makers and practitioners seeking to provide lasting solutions for people living in encampments are encouraged to read USICH's 2015 publication, [*Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue*](#). This document is designed to assist communities in developing an action plan that will link people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing opportunities. The information and ideas contained within this document have been developed by USICH based upon conversations and problem-solving discussions with advocates, housing and services providers, and government officials across the country regarding what they have learned, and are still learning, about the most effective approaches and strategies. We want to thank all of the communities that have participated in conversations and written dialogue about this topic and the challenges they face.

USICH believes that there is still more to be learned and explored, and this document is not intended as a final statement on the best practices for addressing the housing and services needs of people living in encampments. Rather, the intended purpose of this document is to advance community-level discussions that will strengthen practices and strategies.

The perspectives USICH brings to the preparation of the document include:

- The formation of encampments do not represent an end to homelessness; rather encampments are an indication of a critical need to create more effective local systems for responding to unsheltered homelessness.
- Strategies that make encampments an official part of the homelessness response system can distract communities from focusing on connecting people to permanent housing solutions and create costs to ensure safety, security, and well-being.
- People sleeping in encampments are diverse and interventions must address a range of needs, challenges, and goals.
- The forced dispersal of encampments is not an appropriate solution and can make it more difficult to achieve lasting housing and service outcomes to its inhabitants.

¹ USICH recognizes that different terms are used for such settings—such as “tent cities”—but has chosen to use “encampments” in this document, while encouraging communities to use whatever language works best locally.

Effective Strategies and Approaches

[*Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue*](#) provides communities with guidance for developing a local action plan that engages both residents of encampments and an array of community partners. We've identified four key elements for such action plans, summarized here and described in more detail within the publication:

- 1. Preparation and Adequate Time for Planning and Implementation:** Action plans should ensure that there is adequate time for strategizing, collaboration, outreach, engagement, and the identification of meaningful housing options. Adequate time is essential to achieve the primary objective of meeting the needs of each person and assisting them to end their homelessness.
- 2. Collaboration across Sectors and Systems:** Action plans should include collaboration between a cross-section of public and private agencies, neighbors, business owners, and governmental entities, based upon where the encampment is located. The action plan should feature strong communication among a broad range of community service providers and managers of the permanent housing resources that are being utilized in order to maximize efficiency, align resources, and address system gaps.
- 3. Performance of Intensive and Persistent Outreach and Engagement:** Action plans should involve agencies that have strong outreach experience and demonstrated skills in engaging vulnerable and unsheltered people. Effective outreach is essential for effectively connecting people with coordinated assessment systems, resources, and housing options.
- 4. Provision of Low-Barrier Pathways to Permanent Housing:** Action plans should focus on providing people with clear, low-barrier pathways for accessing and attaining permanent housing opportunities and should not focus on relocating people to other encampment settings.

Individuals and organizations actively engaged in working on these issues are encouraged to review [*Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue*](#) and to use its accompanying [Planning Checklist](#).

Continuing the Dialogue

It is our hope and intention that this document and the framework presented will advance community-level discussions that will strengthen practices and foster strategies for addressing those challenges. We look forward to continuing to work together to broaden our understanding and share solutions and lessons learned, and welcome additional dialogue and input on the perspectives and information presented.

For more information, or to share your experiences and perspectives on these issues, please contact the [USICH Regional Coordinator](#) who works with communities within your state. You can also learn more about [related topics](#) on the USICH website.